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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND A GOODLY HERITAGE.

Sermon preached at the Weymouth Church Congress,
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BY

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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

A GOODLY HERITAGE.

"The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground ; yea, I have a goodly heritage."—Ps. xvi. 7.

Some ten years ago, in my East London days, I was taking a ten days' Mission in a large parish, and, among many other interviews after one of the services, a working-man, who had been converted in connection with a neighbouring chapel, asked to see me. It appeared that he had been attending the first five nights of the Mission, and had, by God's grace, been impressed by the sermons on death, judgment, sin, and forgiveness, with which, naturally, the Mission opened. After expressing surprise that what he called "the Gospel" was preached in our pulpits, and having discussed many interesting points with me, he leant forward and asked, with engaging frankness, in a confidential whisper : "Are you happy in the Church of England, Mr. Ingram ? " What was in his honest but not very carefully instructed mind was apparently this : Could any one who believed in Mission-work, who in the open-air or Mission services or workshops tried to preach the Gospel to the poor, and who used extempore prayer be happy in a Church which valued an historic ministry, which venerated Sacraments, and which employed in its

worship the stately and balanced petitions in the Book of Common Prayer? Now, what he, from his point of view, felt and expressed about the Church of England, I find felt, if not always expressed, from many other points of view to-day. Time was when a Church Congress was in danger of becoming a mutual admiration society, where statistics were complacently unrolled about the number of communicants and the churches which had been built during the past ten or twenty years, when references to our "incomparable Liturgy" adorned the speeches of many speakers. The danger is the reverse to-day: we are reminded at every turn of the defects of the Church to which we belong; the Prayer-book, we are told, is not quite "Catholic," and must be supplemented largely from other sources, or it is said, from another point of view, to teach "rank sacerdotalism;" "we want more elasticity," we are told, "in the Church;" "we are divided at every point into hostile camps;" "we are financially on an unsound basis;" "we busy ourselves about ritual to the exclusion of great moral issues;" "we cannot combine even on the education question;" "when it comes to common action we are miserably weak compared to bodies half our size." "That's just like the Church of England," I have heard a man say when something untoward happens, and yet that very man has been brought up and nurtured by it from his cradle, and, as a matter of fact, at the moment when he says it is probably giving his life in its service. You will not suppose for a moment that I am underrating the value of criticism, or denying that many of the criticisms I have quoted are substantially true, and of the two dangers undoubtedly the second is the less of the two. Anything is better than vapid self-complacency or indolent self-congratulation; but still, in days when criticism of the Church is the predominant note even among Churchmen, I do see a danger that loyalty, especially among the young, may die out of our midst and that the sort of service which can only come from enthusiastic love may grow cold. "The love of many shall grow cold." Is that prophecy to be fulfilled to-day?

REASONS FOR LOYALTY.

And therefore it is that I would start this Congress with the note of the same intense loyalty which the ancient Jew felt for the Church to which he belonged and for the country which he loved so well; as he looked round upon what some might have considered the barren hills of Palestine, and thought over the long history of his chosen race and the good hand of his God upon him, he cried aloud in love and gratitude, "The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground; yea, I have a goodly heritage." To answer, then, the question of my friend the working-man, I am happy in the Church of England—in the first place, because I know it to be soundly and profoundly Catholic. If the Nag's Head fable has long been the scoff of historians, so also has the unguarded assertion that the delivery of the instruments formed the essence of an Ordination, and, therefore, one of the most certain facts of history is that the ancient Church of England is a true branch of the Holy Catholic Church. Speaking, then, as a member of the Congress rather than as a Bishop, I am happy in the Church of England because in it I can look back through an unbroken history to the time of Christ Himself, and can rejoice in the validity of its Orders, and the security of its Sacraments, and the purity of its Creed. And, therefore, I put aside with decision the suggestion that, to be a Catholic, I must be in communion with the Bishop of Rome, and pray to be preserved from—what to me would be—the supreme disloyalty of denying my Orders, and repudiating the validity of the communions which have fed me from my boyhood until this day.

THE PRAYER-BOOK.

Then, when I take the Prayer-book and study it with the help of such an excellent book as Mr. Frere's new edition, practically rewritten, of Proctor's *Históry of the Prayer-book* (I mention it because a study of it would help many of the lay-people of the Church as well as the clergy), I find, of course, as one naturally would expect, certain

points in the Prayer-book which most unprejudiced minds would regret. It may fairly be considered, even by the most loyal Churchmen, a matter of regret that the long, unbroken canon, so familiar to the students of ancient liturgies, long before the influence of Rome became so predominant, should have been broken up into three separate prayers, that those old and beautiful breathings of benediction—you can scarcely call them prayers—over the faithful departed, “grant them eternal rest, and may everlasting light shine upon them,” should have been so rigidly repressed, that the great rehearsal of our Lord’s work in Redemption, Resurrection, and Ascension—still preserved in the Scottish Liturgy—should have been omitted from the Consecration Prayer; but as we read over the history of the convulsions through which the Prayer-book lived, who can doubt that God’s guiding Hand was over His Church, and her sacred Liturgy, that Bucer’s reforming zeal was held in check by a Higher Power, and that what was too ruthlessly cut out in an earlier period when some excuse must be made for the terrible abuses which necessitated the Reformation, found its way back into it through the Catholic instincts of the Caroline divines, and that even the Black Rubric in its present form can never be quoted as denying—what I believe every faithful Evangelical really holds in his heart, however he may express it—the Real and Essential Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion?

FREEDOM AND LAW.

And yet, while happy in the Church of England because it is profoundly catholic, I find in it a freedom and a liberty which gives me no sense of bondage to a system. I am under authority; but, as the Bishop of Birmingham says so well in his *Mission of the Church*, the authority rather of a father than of a tyrant. I am bound, of course, by the rules of the Divine society to which I belong; I am told—if I am a priest—to say my daily service twice a day; I have the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels for each saint’s day, clearly marking out that I am, even if only a layman, to learn the lessons they

contain in church, and receive, if possible, the Holy Communion. I recite at each service a Creed, and am bound by that Creed—it is a perpetual reminder of the principles and truths for which I fight; I am to keep Fridays and Ember Days and Vigils as days of fasting or abstinence; but, on the other hand, the rules are few and simple; they all contain principles—the principle of joyful commemoration, the principle of regular waiting upon God, the principle of self-control—but so long as I am loyal to these few definite rules, embodying principles, I am free to live my life “at home in my Father’s house.” I am to confess my sins to God by myself, or I may go to some discreet and learned minister and open my grief. I am not bound by a thousand ritual ceremonies in my worship. I must be reverent, but be reverent in my own way. I am told facts rather than given definitions; I am told the fact of our Lord’s special presence in the Holy Communion. I am not asked to assent to impossible definitions as to how it is vouchsafed, and, therefore, it is the liberty of the Church of England—the freedom, the openness, the simplicity—which helps to make it so fair a ground in which our lot is cast, and which helps to constitute it what it is—a goodly heritage.

RITUAL TYRANNY.

And, before I leave this point, for God’s sake let nothing rob us of this freedom. It makes the blood run warm through our veins to hear in the Magna Charta of England the words “the Church of England shall be free;” but there is no good the Church of England being free unless we ourselves keep our freedom in the Church of England. Like many others this summer, I have been breathing the mountain-air of Scotland, and came back, as so many of us do, not only refreshed in body, but renovated in mind and spirit by contact with Nature, and through Nature with the God of Nature. God does not become a different God when we worship Him in church, and the Prayer-book, from first to last, breathes the mountain-air of healthy worship; but when one turns from such a book, and good

devotional books which breathe the same spirit, to some books produced and even used to-day in the name of religion, it is like plunging from the mountains into the close atmosphere of a hothouse ; ritual directions unsanctioned by our Church regulate every detail of worship, an infinity of little trifling rules embarrass and disturb the conscience ; the grand conception of being lifted up by the Spirit in the Holy Communion into the actual Presence of Christ, surrounded by His saints and angels, in His glory, is fettered, if not crippled, by ideas appropriate to a materialising and really uncatholic superstition. Let us get back, my brethren, from the temptation of being wise "above what is written" to the reverent sobriety of statement, so true to Scripture and early Church teaching, which is characteristic of the Church of England ; and while the licence of neglected saints' days, ignored fasts, curtailed liturgies becomes a thing of the past, let there at the same time be an end of mumbled prayers, long, unexplained pauses which only disturb devotion, and a fancy ritual as unspiritual as it is uncatholic.

THE CHURCH AND SCRIPTURE.

But already, by implication, I have mentioned another characteristic which will ever stand out as a leading mark of our great Church, and that is its constant appeal not only to Scripture, but the whole of Scripture. It was in a Church Congress sermon, nearly twenty years ago, that I heard Bishop Lightfoot say, "The Church of England holds her unbroken Orders in one hand, and an open Bible in the other ; and only under such a Church can Christendom be united." And, surely, when those brethren of the Nonconformist bodies, all of them sprung from the womb of the Church of England, do turn again—as did my friend the working man—to examine the witness of the mother Church, who kept the faith alive in England long before they were born, they will find her still in her daily service reading four passages a day of Holy Scripture, still pointing for every sentence of creed she recites to the written word—preserved, so we believe, on purpose to keep the

sacred deposit from change or decay through lapse of time—and maintaining her record to be, in this sense, the most Scriptural branch of the Church in the world. And be sure of this, my brethren, we need this appeal to Scripture to keep us true to-day, both on the right hand and on the left. Take two points alone: What right has a man who believes that Christ once said, “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained” to belittle his Orders? to be afraid of being called a priest? to join in the cry against his brethren of “sacerdotalism”? If we appeal to Scripture, we must appeal to the whole of Scripture, and it is clear that, as Dr. Moberly so well pointed out, while the whole body of the one High Priest is priestly, it is the Lord’s will that that body should have organs through which to act, and that those organs are not other than those to whom the sacred call and great commission has come to be the priest of a priestly body.

MODERN MARIOLATRY.

And if this is true, on the one hand, of those who refuse to give the full force to a passage of Scripture whose teaching they dislike, what sort of chance has modern Mariolatry of standing an appeal to Scripture at all? Let us be honest, and admit that the Church of England since the Reformation has been often unfaithfully timid in giving the Blessed Virgin Mary that place of honour she must always hold in the ranks of the saints. In our calendar there are two festivals in her honour marked for special observance, and two others among the black-letter festivals, but in our popular teaching the dread of Rome has made us suicidal in our cold neglect—suicidal for it has led by reaction to that very Mariolatry against which Scripture protests. But what ground is there in Scripture, or in any revealed truth, for attributing to the Blessed Virgin any sort of control over the Will of the Second Person of the Trinity? There is no prayer which grates upon the ear trained to Scriptural teaching more than a prayer addressed sometimes in the Roman Church to the

Blessed Virgin: "Now show that thou art a mother." The very account of the occasion when she did on earth "show she was a mother," one would have thought, was preserved specially for the purpose to show for ever how unscriptural is the basis for such a prayer. We are not to think of the saints, it is true, as separated from us. On the contrary, we say in the Church of England every day, "I believe in the Communion of Saints," and St. Augustine says, "The Church above loves and helps its pilgrim brothers," but worship on earth must be based on revealed facts, and it is not a revealed fact that a cry to any saint or to the Virgin Mary ever reaches them at all. We are strictly in accordance with Scripture and the teaching of the best theology when we direct our worship solely to the Holy Trinity, for, thanks be to God, it is a revealed fact that "we have, through Christ, access by one Spirit to the Father." It is, then, the fearless appeal to Scripture, and the whole of Scripture, which is one of the glories of the Church of England.

THE CHURCH'S FUTURE.

Now, time forbids me to dwell further upon the story of the past. The Church is so rooted in the nation's life that the story of the one is almost the story of the other; but I would rather put before you to-day the thought of the glorious possibilities of the future. At the opening of Southwark Cathedral the other day we took for our motto, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a steward who brings out of his treasure things new and old," and among the new things already beginning to be brought out of the treasure of the Church of England is, in the first place, its missionary zeal. The fact that there are so few definitely missionary Collects in the Prayer-book is a witness to how low the flame of missionary enthusiasm has sometimes burnt. Even now in Melanesia the territory assigned to our Church to convert is the only territory not converted yet to Christ, and our own Missions scarcely cover one-seventh of the Mission-fields of Christendom; but still the zeal, the capacity for self-sacrifice, is there; we have got it in us. Already young and vigorous sons of the Church

of England have gone forth to the ends of the earth, and the more we obey the order "Go into all the world" the more we shall inherit the promise, made only to a missionary Church, "Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." In the second place, we should aim at more elasticity at home. Undoubtedly the Prayer-book, meant to be a help, may be so used as to be a hindrance; but if some simple explanation is given of the Lessons read, if the Psalms are sung to simple chants, if popular hymns are used, if many of the prayers are read and not intoned—I have seen a congregation entirely poor in East London joining most heartily in a Prayer-book service. "How I did hate the Psalms once," said a young working man to me, "but now I love them." Nevertheless, if we want other forms of prayer let us have them. I freely give leave in London for almost any experiment in Mission-work, if it first be submitted for my sanction. Let us show we can hold the old faith and yet adapt it to new needs, and never be content until with the inventiveness of love we have by all means saved some. And lastly, let us draw out of the treasure in our Church something only too little drawn out yet, a large-hearted toleration. I should have thought it must be clear to most thoughtful men that there always will be what may be called a Catholic and a Protestant interpretation of the Prayer-book, and that there always will be High Churchmen and Evangelicals in the Church of England. This is a fundamental fact in the situation which we must accept.

THE CURSE OF PARTY SPIRIT

There have been some suggestions publicly made lately by men I deeply respect for altering or removing or authoritatively interpreting that bone of contention in the Church, the "Ornaments Rubric," and, of course, if the matter does come before Convocation, I shall take my humble part in framing any necessary canon. But I should greatly fear that what happened thirty years ago would happen again. When letters of business, so I read in Archbishop Tait's Life, had been actually received from the Crown to enable Convocation to deal with the

question, after three years' acrimonious discussion it was decided to do nothing, and the attempt had stirred up the very bitterness which it was intended to allay. Now, what I would suggest to the Church at large is this: to attempt to alter nothing in its formulas or rubrics, but to draw out of the heart of the Church that large-hearted tolerance with one another which shall enable us to live and work together. If once we grasp and admit that there are these two renderings which can conscientiously be given to the message of the Church of England, while the substance of that message remains the same, all ground of bitterness would be taken away. Do we realise even yet the waste of energy involved by that party spirit? Is anything more humiliating than reading the long wrangle of forty years, part of which is recorded at length in that most interesting Life to which I have referred? There must be, of course, a clear and distinct line, beyond which toleration cannot go, and if the authorities of the Church have no power to keep that line, their authority must be strengthened. I have prosecuted, and I should prosecute again, Mariolatry in the public services, or any use of the sacred elements unauthorised by our Church, as, for instance, in the service of Benediction. I have prosecuted, and should prosecute again, a disorderly Protestantism which disturbs services it dislikes. But the great mass of the subjects which produce friction do not touch the essentials of the faith at all, and come within the field of toleration between the two extremes. What they require for their treatment is a large-hearted sympathy on behalf of the pastor, lest "if he overdrive the flock one day all the flock will die;" large-hearted sympathy of one parish priest with another, glad that that other should win his people by a ceremonial which he could not use himself; and large-hearted sympathy of both with the rulers of the Church, who, in difficult days, have but one desire—to lead on the Church they love to its best and develop to the full its glorious heritage.

VOICES OF THE PAST.

And in advocating such a policy, I will fortify myself with some voices, which all will reverence, from the past.

I do not quote them for a moment as approving any special application of the principle of large-hearted tolerance, but having been driven by their wide outlook over the whole field of observation, and their long experience, to see that a large-hearted policy was the only possible one and the right one. The first voice is that of one whose name will ever be honoured in the Church, Dean Church, who with other signatories sent a memorial to Archbishop Tait, in which these words occur :—

“ Having regard to the uncertainties which have been widely thought to surround some recent interpretations of ecclesiastical law, as well as to the equitable claims of congregations placed in the most dissimilar religious circumstances, we cannot but think that the recognised toleration of even wide diversities of ceremonial is alone consistent with the interests of true religion and the well-being of the English Church at the present time. The immediate need of our Church is, in our opinion, a tolerant recognition of divergent ritual practice ; but we feel bound to submit to your Grace that our present troubles are likely to recur, unless the courts by which ecclesiastical causes are decided, in the first instance and on appeal, can be so constructed as to secure the conscientious obedience of clergymen who believe the constitution of the Church of Christ to be of Divine appointment ; and who protest against the State's encroachment upon rights assured to the Church of England by solemn Acts of Parliament.”—*Life of Archbishop Tait*, Vol. II., p. 424.

The next is an extract from a letter of the late Lord Salisbury to the same Archbishop, written on February 5th, 1881 :—

“ I believe that the course it ought to take would be to recognise very clearly the distinction between old-established places of worship and those which, having been built recently, belong rather to the congregation which has been formed in them than to the inhabitants of the district to which (in order to satisfy the law) they have been nominally assigned. In these ‘ congregational ’ churches, when the congregation and the Incumbent are agreed, I think the Bishops would do

wisely to shield the Incumbent from litigation, at least if he did not go further than to act upon the apparently literal interpretation of the Ornaments Rubric.

"If this were accorded and announced, I do not believe that the Incumbents of the older churches would attempt similar practices in opposition to the feelings of their parishioners. The few who did so would be mere eccentrics, and would not be supported.

"Ritualism is too strong to be 'put down;' a serious attempt to do so would simply shatter the Church."—*Life of Archbishop Tait*, Vol. II., p. 448.

And my last quotation is from Archbishop Tait himself, who at the end of his long life, and after years which, but for his courage and personal piety, would have been embittered by the ceaseless conflict over this very question, wrote as follows:—

"I have now been twenty-four years a Bishop, and during that period I have been brought into contact with persons of all grades of opinion in the Church of God. The lesson I have derived from this contact has been to respect deeply the opinions of those who are not afraid to act according to the dictates of their consciences. I believe all of them, as they become more conscientious, will be tolerant of difference of opinion; and if I may single out any one characteristic of the Church of England which seems to indicate it as the Church of a great and world-extending nation, it is this: that it is wide enough to embrace within its sympathies all the various shades of opinion which the different schools of the Church contain. Had any one school of thought so prevailed as to drive all others out of the Church, it would have been an evil day for the Church and the nation. Looking abroad, I do not see this liberty in any other country or Church but our own; on the contrary, what one sees elsewhere is that men are driving each other forth because of their differences in religious sentiment. I thank God that I belong to a Church and a nation which understands what is Catholicity in its true sense, and embraces in one fold good men who desire to promote their Master's cause, even though in many points they differ very widely from each other." (P. 489.)

Or, to go behind all these to one whom they would all have acknowledged as greater than any of them, St. Paul—"By love serve one another," he cries, "for all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Gal. v. 13-15).

THE FUTURE.

But, freed from the bitterness of party spirit, there is no fear for the future of our Church; it is a fair ground; it is a goodly heritage. Children, then, of a grand mother, sons and daughters of the Catholic, free, Scriptural, and historic Church of England, enter more and more—that is my message—upon your goodly heritage. We have a great past, but we have, I believe, a yet greater future, founded upon the rock of truth. No new knowledge can wreck us and no new discovery confound us. With a strength as yet unspent and resources of energy on which we have never yet fully drawn, we front the future. May we be found at our great work when Christ comes again.

A. F. WINNINGTON INGRAM, D.D.,

BISHOP OF LONDON.

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